



Feeder Favorites--- Bird Feeding Benefits

Vicky Runoe, Conservation Education Supervisor, IDFG

If you enjoy feeding birds, you are not alone. It is estimated that one third of the adult population of North America feeds nearly one billion pounds of seed annually as well as a million pounds of suet or bird "puddings." Some folks feed just during the winter months while others enjoy attracting birds to feeders all year long. The greatest benefit to the birds would appear to be during the winter when natural food sources are scarce and the weather harsh. Recent research indicates that this is indeed the case. But feeding birds has many benefits and they are not just for the birds!

The most obvious benefit of feeding is providing an easily available food source. Most species that visit feeders are small birds with high surface-area-to-volume ratios. Their small size means that they have a hard time maintaining the continuous body temperatures needed to stay warm. Having a high metabolism helps generate this needed heat, but it must be fueled continually to keep the birds warm through the day and at night. This warmth is generated by the fats in seeds that are, in turn, converted into body fat which is burned to produce heat. As many feederwatchers can attest, food consumption increases in the fall as the birds begin to accumulate fat. Migratory species use this extra fat to fuel their migration, but the challenge for resident birds is to maintain that body fat as winter sets in. During a winter day, black-capped chickadees convert their food into enough fat to nearly double their total amount of body fat by nightfall. To do this, researchers have estimated that these little birds need 20 times more food in winter than during the rest of the year, the equivalent of 150 sunflower seeds a day. Common redpolls, an occasional Idaho feeder visitor will eat as much as 42% of their own body weight a day. A 150-lb human would need to eat 63lbs of food a day to rival this feat! The presence of feeders can certainly help supply the food needed by these birds.

As many feederwatchers have noticed, some species seem to spend their time caching food instead of eating



Black-capped chickadees, like many other avian winter residents, need a constant supply of food in the winter. They must have fat to burn to stay warm, but because they fly, they cannot accumulate too much at one time.

it immediately. Chickadees, nuthatches, and jays are avid hoarders and watching them gathering and storing seeds is enough to exhaust any of us. Such behavior benefits these species by providing food sources that can be used at a later time. Chickadees and jays have both demonstrated the ability to remember where they have hidden food for more than several months. And since most of us do not end up with sunflowers sprouting from under shingles on our homes, much of the food that is cached is indeed eaten. Other birds seemingly gorge themselves at a feeder. Often, these birds are simply storing food either in their crop or the diverticula, an expandable portion of the esophagus. Once full, the bird flies to a sheltered location where it can hull and digest its meal without expending more energy flying between food sources. Perhaps the champion of this type of seed storing is the red crossbill that can store up to 300 spruce seeds in its crop at one time.

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Eating is a full-time job for small birds during winter.

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Visit Idaho Museum of Natural History to see Edson Fichter wildlife drawings.

3 Volunteers Restore Sagebrush Habitat

Wendy Green

Cold weather doesn't stop students from volunteering for sagebrush seed collection.

The presence of feeders can certainly help birds survive extreme winter conditions. Researchers at the University of Wisconsin-Madison found that feeders increased the survival of black-capped chickadees during severe winters with prolonged periods of extreme cold. But during more normal winters, chickadees were found to supplement their natural diet by getting only 20 – 25% of their food from feeders. Such findings are welcome to feederwatchers concerned about making the birds dependent upon feeder offerings. In fact, banding studies have shown that birds finding a feeding station within their normal winter territory simply incorporate it into their daily rounds. If the feeders are empty, the birds move on to other food sources.

The presence of feeders, however, is thought to be partially responsible for the overall northward range expansion of a number of species found in parts of the United States. The vibrant Northern Cardinal, a beloved bird of much of the eastern part of the country did not over-winter in the northern states until a few decades ago. Here in Idaho, feeders ensure that American Goldfinches, a cold-sensitive species, are more common during the winter months that they were in the past. Currently, researchers are watching the northern expansion of the Carolina Wren as more and more feederwatchers observe this eastern species at feeding stations across the northern tier of the eastern U.S. Other factors undoubtedly play a role in these range expansions, but the presence of feeders is certainly important.

Charting such range expansions highlights another benefit of feeding birds, data collection. All across the country many people who feed birds keep records of what they see and when. Some of these records span decades, giving researchers studying wintering birds a wealth of information to draw upon. People also participate in organized projects such as the winter-long Project FeederWatch sponsored by the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology or the Great Backyard Bird Count held over the President's Day weekend. The data gathered by "citizen scientists" participating in these projects has documented many things including rare species, range expansions, population declines or increases, and the irruption cycles of wintering finches and owls. Visit <http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc/> to find out more about this project. Project FeederWatch, now in its 20th year, has a very important database that researchers are finding invaluable as they study North America's winter bird populations.

Feeding the birds also benefits each of us directly as we observe and learn from these feathered wonders. Initially, we may simply watch the birds coming in to feed. But soon curiosity is sparked and we find ourselves wondering what kinds of birds we are seeing. Identification becomes important. Then we begin to notice that some species behave differently than others. We find that a flock of juncos prefers to feed on the ground while a flock of house finches perches on feeders hanging above the ground. Seed preference becomes obvious and we make sure to have the proper feeders available. Our monitoring of the seasons begins to include not only the calendar and the thermometer but also the birds seen in our yards. We put up nest boxes and plant native species that attract birds and other wildlife. In short, feeding birds makes us feel closer to the natural world, an important link in today's increasingly technological society. Feeding the birds brings time for quiet observation and relaxation as we pause in our daily rounds to check out the feeders. It allows us to re-connect with our innate sense of wonder and awe at creatures so very different from ourselves. And who cannot help but be awed by the activity of birds attracted to your feeders on a cold snowy winter day.

Fish & Game Volunteers Help Restore Food and Shelter for Idaho's Wildlife

*Wendy Green,
freelance writer*

Forty-five students from Mr. Lunsford's biology class trudged through the snow and scattered out across the brushy hillside. The snow was nearly knee deep and the temperature was 13 degrees, but the bright sunshine and calm winds made it a perfect December day for gathering sagebrush seed.

Jerry Lunsford teaches biology at Payette High School, and his classes have been collecting sagebrush seed every winter for nearly a decade.

"I want them out of the classroom and learning from hands-on experience," Lunsford explained. "Some of these kids have not had a lot of outdoor experience, and they

never forget what they learn when they're out here actually doing the things we've talked about in class."

Some of those classroom discussions revolve around the importance of sagebrush to many of Idaho's native bird and animal species.

"We're doing this to help deer and elk during the winter," said student Amanda Carlson. She and her classmates have learned that mule deer, elk, sage-grouse, songbirds and many other native species depend on sagebrush for food, cover, and nesting habitat. In fact, the U.S. Geological Survey estimates that more than 350 species of plants and animals throughout the West depend on sagebrush ecosystems. Healthy stands of sagebrush are especially important when



Payette High School student, Lorena Hernandez, shows collected sagebrush seed. This photo was taken in December 2005, but Jerry Lunsford's biology students were back again this year.

other food sources are buried under the snow. Bitterbrush, another native plant of Idaho's shrub-steppe habitat, also provides food and shelter for wildlife. IDFG volunteers collect bitterbrush seed each summer.

The seed that volunteers collect is taken to the seed extractory at Lucky Peak Nursery, where it is spread on screened racks and allowed to air dry for several weeks. In the spring, the seed is sown at the nursery and grown in small containers until the following year, when more IDFG volunteers will plant the sagebrush and bitterbrush seedlings to help revegetate areas that have been burned by wildfire.

"Volunteers enable the department to do large-scale habitat restoration projects," explained Mary Dudley, volunteer coordinator for IDFG's Southwest Region. "Sportsmen, school kids, scout troops and retirees help us plant 25,000 to 35,000 seedlings each year. We couldn't do this critical habitat work without our hardworking volunteers."

Idaho is home to several different species of sagebrush or *Artemisia*. Different kinds of sagebrush grow in different parts of the state, depending on soils, precipitation, elevation, and other environmental factors. IDFG staff must make sure they plant the right species of sage on the right sites,

where it has the best chance of survival. In addition, the chemicals in sagebrush make some species more palatable to wildlife. When planting the tastier varieties, managers have to plant plenty of seedlings, or the hungry critters might gobble up all the new plants before they have time to mature and spread more seeds on their own.

When sagebrush burns, it does not come back quickly. After a stand-replacement fire, it might take Wyoming big sagebrush thirty years to fully recover. In the meantime, non-native species such as cheatgrass and medusahead rye can invade the burned areas, outcompeting native grasses and forbs and increasing the risk of more fires. These invasive annual grasses do not provide the nutrients and cover that wildlife need.

Sometimes, such vast areas are affected that hand-planting is not practical, and IDFG uses aerial seeding. Seed collected this winter, for example, will help revegetate the thousands of acres burned by last summer's wildfires north of Emmett.

This year's seed collection already took place, but if you would like to be involved in the planting north of Emmett this March, please contact Mary or Michael at 327-7099/327-7095 to sign up and get details. Planting will occur every Saturday in March.

Report Collared Swans in SE Idaho!

*Lauri Hanauska-Brown, nongame biologist,
Upper Snake Region, IDFG*

The Idaho Department of Fish and Game is once again asking for your help in looking for collared swans. Budget cuts have reduced the Department's ability to hire personnel designated to look for collared swans. Federal and other state agencies have experienced similar cutbacks therefore routine swan surveys will be greatly reduced this year.

Almost 400 trumpeter swans in southeastern Idaho were collared during the winters of 2001-2004. Trumpeters have also been collared in surrounding states and in several Canadian provinces. The survival and movements of these collared swans provide biologists with information critical to the management and conservation of trumpeters range wide.

Neck collars are 3-4" tall and can be green, yellow, red, white, or many other colors depending on collar age and color fading. All collars have an alpha numeric code. Some collars may also have a radio and antennae attached.

Project cooperators are asking that the all collared trumpeter swans be reported to the Idaho Department of Fish and Game at phone: 208-525-7290, or lhanausk@idfg.idaho.gov. Please be sure to include in your report: collar color, alpha numeric code if possible, location of observation, date and your contact information. Thank you for your help!



©Jim Greaves

An example of a collared swan.

New Year's Resolutions for Wildlife! You love wildlife. Here are just a few suggestions to do something for Idaho's wildlife this year. Happy new year!

- * Donate to the nongame program on your Idaho State Tax Return.
- * Renew your subscription to Windows to Wildlife.
- * Hang a birdfeeder in your yard.
- * Give a birdfeeder as a gift.
- * Plant a native plant in your garden.
- * Help a child make a birdhouse.
- * Attend a wildlife event (see back page for winter events).
- * Donate to a wildlife conservation organization.
- * Start recycling, if you don't already.
- * Read a book on a species you are interested in.
- * Host a wildlife movie night.
- * Volunteer with Idaho Fish and Game, or another wildlife agency.
- * Attend an Audubon field trip.

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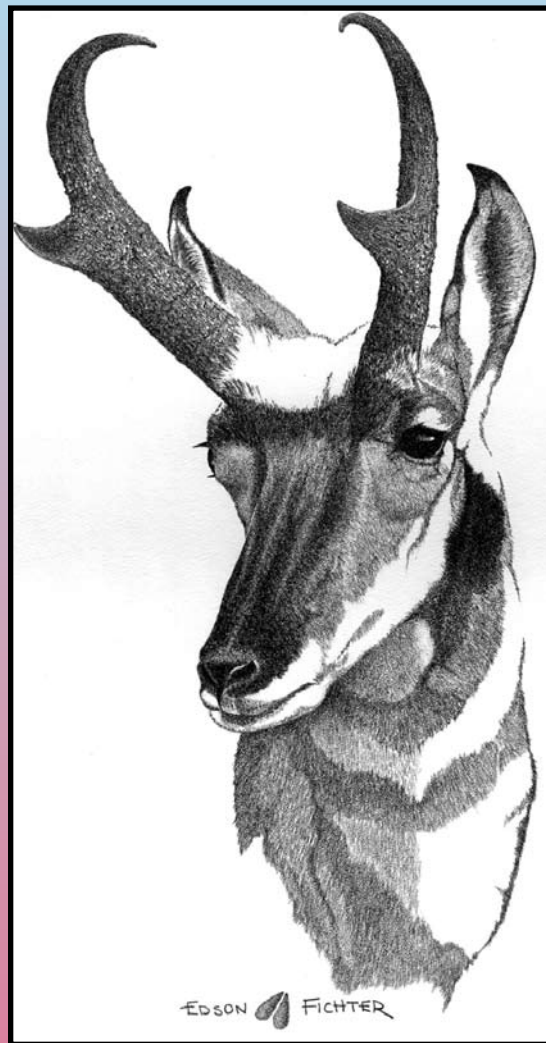
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An American pronghorn sketch by Edson Fichter.

*Thank You
to
All Contributors*

The following people made direct donations, purchased or renewed a wildlife license plate, or let us know of a tax check-off donation between October 1 - November 30, 2006. This list represents those marked the contributor box when they donated to the Nongame Program, however, many subscribers not listed here have contributed generously and Idaho's Nongame wildlife thanks you ALL!

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Suzanne Waterbury
Robert Weeks

Museum Presents Edson Fichter Exhibit

Frank Spaeth, Idaho Museum of Natural History

The Idaho Museum of Natural History is currently presenting an exhibition of Edson Fichter's wildlife art in the museum's seasonal gallery. A well-known Pocatello artist and biologist, Fichter was an extremely talented wildlife illustrator, photographer, and writer.

A zoology professor at Idaho State University from 1949 until 1975, he was a skilled wildlife biologist known for his research on pronghorn behavior. Fichter was also instrumental in the founding of the Idaho Museum of Natural History and served as its first Curator of Mammalogy. He also taught wildlife illustration and other natural history classes at the museum for many years.

Fichter was a very prolific artist and left a legacy of hundreds of drawings, photographs, and poems which were collected by many admirers. His work has been featured in several publications, including "Pahsimeroi: Land Beyond Words," a collection of his poems and drawings inspired by his pronghorn research in the Pahsimeroi River Valley near Mackay, Idaho. Fichter was also co-author and illustrator of "The Amphibians of Idaho," published by the museum in 1964.

The exhibit features nearly 40 of Fichter's artistic works, including drawings, photographs and poetry, as well as an overview of his life and career. The artwork consists of pieces owned by the Museum and others pieces on loan from private collectors.

The exhibition will be open for public viewing from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. at the Idaho Museum of Natural History in Pocatello, Tuesdays through Saturdays. The museum is closed on Sundays and Mondays. For more information, call 208-282-3317.

Winter *Wildlife Events*

Craters of the Moon- Idaho Falls/Arco

**Cross-country Skiing/
Snowshoeing:** Usually mid-
December-February

The 7 Mile Loop Drive is groomed for skiing as snow pack and staffing allow and can be completed in 2 to 4 hours. Excellent opportunities for snowshoeing abound throughout the park including a new 1 mile trail Snowshoe Trail.

Winter Ecology Workshops

— Saturdays Jan. 6, 20, 27 and
Feb. 3, 10, and 17 — 9:30 a.m. - 3
PM. No charge.

Explore a different side of Craters of the Moon on a guided winter ecology snowshoe walk and workshop. The workshop starts with a 45-60 minute classroom session followed by several hours out in the park on snowshoes. Snowshoes are available for use. Reservations are required and participants need to be at least 10 years of age for this moderately strenuous walk. Call early to sign up for these popular excursions at 208-527-3257.

SnowSchool: Wednesdays and
Thursdays in Jan. and Feb.

Bring your students to Craters for a mini winter ecology lesson including a 1 mile ranger led snowshoe trek near the Visitor Center. Snowshoes for about 30 students are available and the walks are suitable for third graders and up. Call the park at (208) 527-3257 for more information or to schedule a class visit. After registering for a SnowSchool visit we will provide you with detailed information on what to wear and bring.

**SnowSchool Teacher's
Workshop:** Saturday and Sunday
Jan. 13 & 14.

Also this winter, Craters will be offering a SnowSchool Teacher's Workshop on winter ecology for 1 college credit hour through the Sawtooth Science Institute. This 2-day workshop will provide educators with a variety of educational tools that can be used with students in the classroom and in the field to introduce winter ecology concepts. Contact the Sawtooth Science Institute at 208-788- 9686 to sign up for this special event.

Idaho Bird Observatory-Boise

Bald Eagle Days

An annual celebration to raise local awareness, appreciation, and support for the Boise River and its wildlife.

January 24th, 25th, 26th-
International Wildlife Film Festival
at The Flicks. Award-winning
films from around that world that
promotes awareness, knowledge
and understanding of wildlife,
habitat, people and nature.

January 25th- Dinner Gala Benefit
and Wildlife Art Auction to support
conservation efforts at Barber Pool.
\$20/ticket. Call Greg Kaltenecker at
(208) 426-4354 for tickets and more
information.

January 26th - Bald Eagle Days
Public Celebration — 10AM-
4.30 PM at the Shakespeare
Festival Center, Free! Informative
presentations with Bald Eagles and
other live birds of prey, booths from
local sponsors, games and face
painting for kids, refreshments and
viewing scopes.

For complete details of all the Bald
Eagle Days activities, please visit:
<http://bald eagledays.blogspot.com>
for more information.

Idaho Department of Fish and Game- Nampa/Boise

**Sagebrush and Bitterbrush
planting** see article on page 2.

World Center for Birds of Prey-Boise

Road Trips With Raptors

— Sunday, February 25th. A
presentation by our Raptor
Specialist about migration by birds
of prey.

February 10th and February 17,
Cub Scout Saturdays, Cub Scouts
are invited to visit to The World
Center for Birds of Prey on these 2
Saturdays for reduced admission
and special presentations.

Project Wild About Raptors

— Friday, March 9th and Saturday,
March 10th. A workshop for
teachers who have taken Project
Wild. This is a workshop presented
by Idaho Fish and Game partnering
with The Peregrine Fund's World
Center for Birds of Prey and the
BLM. The first evening of the
workshop is spent at The Peregrine
Fund's World Center for Birds of
Prey. Day two of the workshop is
a field day at BLM's Snake River
National Conservation Area.

Please submit a wildlife event you
know of by contacting Sara Focht at
sfocht@idfg.idaho.gov

Wildlife events are now online. Visit
[http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/cms/
wildlife/nongame/watchable/events.
cfm](http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/cms/wildlife/nongame/watchable/events.cfm). Click on wildlife events!